THE THREE HOLY KINGS

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WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE substance of this book was prepared as one of a course of familiar biblical lectures. It is not offered in its present form as an exhaustive and scholarly treatise, but rather as a simple grouping together of fact, opinion, and legend respecting the sublime story of the "Wise Men of the East."

Contributions to sacred literature have been, for the most part, either profound discussions adapted only to the wants of scholars, or simple narratives prepared for juvenile minds. Neither of these are suited to the taste of the majority of adult readers.

It has seemed therefore to the author, that a more popular method of inculcating information respecting Bible topics would meet with favor, and, with the blessing of God, tend to create a more general interest in the Divine Word.

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THE

THREE HOLY KINGS.

AMONG the numberless relics, which for centuries have been the pride of the old city of Cologne, none are accounted of greater dignity or worthy of more veneration, than the three skulls, enshrined in her Cathedral, and said to be those of the Magian Kings or "Wise Men," who, led by the star, came from the East to pay their homage to the Infant Redeemer.

It is but a few years since the celebration of the seven hundredth anniversary of the transfer of these remains from Milan, and the interest and excitement that then ensued have been seldom equaled in the history of similar events.

The city was crowded with pilgrims, eager for admission within the Cathedral. So great was the enthusiasm, that those who were able to press through the dense throng, and arrive at the shrine containing the sacred relics, deemed themselves most fortunate, and as they knelt, devoutly prayed in words such as these:

"O holy three kings, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, pray for us now and in the hour of death." This prayer was also printed on strips of paper and widely distributed among the assembled pilgrims; and these slips when, as in some instances, as a mark of special favor, rubbed upon the skulls, became doubly sacred to the possessors as charms against accident and disease.

Lest it excite surprise that to the city of Cologne should belong the honor of possessing the relics of these holy kings, we would explain, that its present insignificant appearance betokens but little of its former importance. It claims a Roman origin, and boasts of being the birthplace of Agrippina, the mother of Nero. Thence Trajan was summoned to the throne of the Cæsars, and there Clovis declared king of the Franks.

Its merchants were among the first of their period, and the genius of its architects and artists was acknowledged by all. Its scholastic fame attracted students from every land, and it numbered among its distinguished men such names as those of the saintly Thomas of Aquinas and the poetic Petrarch.

For centuries it was the chief city of Northern Europe, enjoying a direct trade with Italy, and through it with the East. As it increased in wealth and might, it became the patron of the Arts, and delighting to copy the customs and manners of the Imperial City, gained the title of the "Rome of the North."

As years rolled on, the breath of time blighted its privileges and destroyed its prosperity, until now it presents but little of its former grandeur, save in its splendid architectural structures, which, though hoary with the dust of ages, still delight the lover of the sublime and beautiful.

Most prominent among them, is the noble Cathedral, which has become the mausoleum of these sacred bones. This structure, — even in its unfinished state, the purest Gothic monument of the Middle Ages, — though begun in the thirteenth century and continued at intervals up to the present time, is even now but a fragment. When fully completed, it will cover an area of five hundred feet in length and two hundred and thirty feet in breadth. Its two principal towers are to have an altitude of five hundred feet, though so slowly have they progressed, that the top of one of them, at not more than a third of the intended height, is surmounted by a crane similar to that which centuries ago was employed by the masons to elevate their stone. Shortly after the original crane was taken down, the city was visited by a furious thunder-storm, which the superstitious inhabitants connected with the removal of the weather-worn crane, and they therefore insisted that it should be replaced. The choir only is finished, and as it is adorned with chapels, columns, and arches of rarest workmanship, and enriched with frescos, exquisitely stained windows, and carved stalls and seats, presents an almost bewildering spectacle.

We will not, however, describe at length these

architectural beauties, but give our attention at once to a small chapel near the high altar, which contains the tomb of the "Three Holy Kings," toward whose shrine for centuries the feet of so many devout pilgrims have turned.

Their remains are inclosed in a case of silver gilt, ornamented with small arcades, containing figures of apostles and prophets, and originally adorned only with the rarest gems. Most of these, the Romish prelates have, from time to time, replaced with imitations, in order to give the originals as relics to those whom they delighted to honor; yet the veritable stones, cameos, and other treasures which still remain, are said to be now worth nearly a million of dollars. If this be true, some idea of the former extravagant richness of this sarcophagus may be inferred.

One end of the sepulchral case is inclosed with glass, through which may be seen the three ghastly skulls, rendered the more hideous by crowns of jewels, which thus become a startling admonition that at death riches must be left with the mortal dust.

Upon these skulls are inscribed in letters of rubies, the names "Gaspar," "Melchior," "Balthazar," and these are the titles which have been given to the "Three Kings of Cologne," declared by the Romish Church to be the Magi. How highly these sacred relics are esteemed by the Church, and how scrupulously they are guarded, we may judge from the following couplet on the front of the shrine: —

"Corpora sanctorum recubant hic terna magorum,
Ex his sublatum, nihil est, alibive locatum."

"Here repose the bodies of the three holy Magi
From which nothing has been taken or is elsewhere placed."

Here the questions occur: What is the story of these kingly remains; and how came these dry bones to find this resting-place?

As we seek to answer these inquiries, we find the truth of history indissolubly blended with the romance of legend. We are like one, who, while seeking the head-waters of some tortuous river, is tempted from his course at each new mile, by bays and creeks and inflowing currents.

In attempting then to discover how these royal bones made their weary journey from the East to the borders of the Rhine, we turn first to history, which tells us that in the year 1162, Frederic I. of Germany (called Barbarossa or the Red-bearded), having laid siege to and conquered the city of Milan in Italy, found these relics in the church of St. Eustorgio, and presented them to Rainaldo, Archbishop of Cologne.

We learn further, that the Emperor Constantine, at the request of the pious Eustorgio, whom he had appointed Prefect of Milan, permitted their transfer thither from Constantinople, where they had been first enshrined.

Here history leads us almost unconsciously into legend, and following the latter, we learn that when the Wise Men had paid their adoration to the infant Jesus, they returned to their own country and devoted themselves to announcing the birth in Judea of a

mighty Prince, the Son of God, whose advent proclaimed "peace and good-will" to the whole world.

When the Apostles, obedient to the parting command of their Divine Master, were dispersed into every country teaching all nations and baptizing them, St. Thomas, whose missionary tour extended to the Indies, found there these early Evangelists, and not only baptized them, but also instructed them more clearly in the doctrines of the Christian faith.

From this time they became still more zealous for the truth, until, bearing the cross to the remotest East, they fell victims to the barbarians to whom they had come with their gracious message.

Thus, in the language of another, "each of them received in return for the earthly crown which he had cast at the feet of the Saviour, the heavenly crown of martyrdom and of everlasting life."

Long years afterward, their remains were discovered by the pious Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, and by her brought to Constantinople, from whence, as we have already seen, they were taken to Milan, and from there finally found a resting-place under the Gothic arches of Cologne's noble Cathedral.

Thus much history and tradition tell us respecting these sacred relics, declared by the Papal Church to be the bones of the "Wise Men of the East."

We cannot, however, but confess to some incredulity when we remember that in the same city of Cologne a church has been erected to the memory

of the sainted Ursula, and her eleven thousand virgins, who, while returning to Brittany from a pious pilgrimage to Rome, were here murdered by the wicked Huns for refusing to break their vows of chastity. Added to the improbability of the story, the fact that some of the bones, said to be theirs, which are everywhere exposed throughout the walls and pavement of the church, have been discovered to be those of sheep and other animals, leads us to conclude that relics are often of doubtful authenticity.

Yet dubious as seems this traditional account of the fortunes of the three kings, it is about all that can be added to the simple words of St. Matthew: —

"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Here, resting upon truth, we know that those who came to do homage to the infant Saviour were Wise Men, that they came from the East, and that they were guided by a star. Three questions are thus suggested. Who, at the time of the birth of our Lord, were known as "Wise Men"? What country was called the "East"? What was the star which proved their heavenly guide?

In explanation of the first of these inquiries, we find that the word translated "Wise Men" in Matthew's gospel, is, in the original "Magi" a Persian word, which is explained by an old heathen writer,

who says: "Among the Persians the lovers of wisdom and servants of the gods are called Magi."

We further find that these Magi were devoted to the study of philosophy, both natural and moral.

From the latter, they elaborated a system of religious belief, while from the study of the former, they become profoundly versed in mechanics, chemistry, and particularly astronomy. Thus accomplished, their influence increased, until, in the course of time, they became not only the religious leaders of the people, but also the advisers of the throne.

Throughout a large portion of the East, kings and rulers were frequently of the order of the Magi, or at least chosen and instructed by them.

As time wore on, their religion became corrupted, and astrology, magic, and divination were ingrafted upon their system of belief. These abuses became more and more glaring until a reformer appeared.

The man who presumed to take upon himself the task of reform was Zoroaster, probably, next to Mohammed, the most successful apostle of a new faith that the heathen world has ever known.

There is much of tradition mingled with the story of his life, but we will give it as it is, letting due allowance be made for the oriental love of romance. Zoroaster cannot be called an originator, as his creed was only a renewing and purifying of the old; but to know his life and teachings is to understand the Magian system of belief, of which he was the highest exponent.

A legend tells us that Zoroaster spent twenty years of his early life in Judea as servant of a prophet, — some say of Elijah, others of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel, probably choosing these names from the fact that his creed had some resemblance to the early Jewish faith.

After the return of Zoroaster from Judea to his own country, he spent a long time in seclusion, inhabiting a cave ; and there inspired, as he insists, by God, prepared the writings illustrative of his belief, called the "Zendavesta" or "Zend," which, in twelve volumes, each composed of an entire bullock's hide, were delivered to the Magi.

These writings declared the Supreme Being to be one God, independent and self-existing from all eternity. This world, however, was not governed by him, as its affairs were said to be conducted by two principles, one of good, called Ormuzd, and the other of evil, by the name of Ahriman. Light was the type of the former, and darkness of the latter. Each strove for the mastery, Ormuzd to benefit the human race, and Ahriman to destroy. Zoroaster taught men to make vows and offer thanks to the one, and to avert by sacrifice the wrath of the other.

Both plants and animals were divided into two classes, some appertaining to the good principle, and others to the evil. Ormuzd made six gods : Benevolence, Truth, Justice, Wisdom, Wealth, and the *Conscious pleasure of doing good.* Whereupon Ahriman made as many to oppose them. Ormuzd then made twenty-four more, and put them in an egg-shell ; but

Ahriman made the same number, and, breaking the shell, let them into it, whereby the evil became mixed with the good. But in process of time, Ahriman, who brings plagues and famine by his evil gods, must be destroyed, and this earth will become a plain, inhabited by one happy society of mankind of one common speech, a race neither needing food nor yielding a shadow.

Light being the symbol of the good deity, Zoroaster permitted his followers to continue the sacred fire in their temples, in accordance with their worship under their former belief.

When worshiping within the sacred inclosures, they turned toward the blazing altar; but when in the open air, they prostrated themselves before the majesty of the sun as the source of light. There seems to have been much that was good among the minor teachings of the prophet, such as the respect to be paid to parents and to the aged, brotherly love, kindness to animals, and the like.

His fundamental error, however, was, that while one God only was acknowledged as supreme, here all notice of him stops, and adoration and thanksgiving were paid only to the inferior deity of Good. It was believed that man was exposed to the influence of the evil genius and continually sinned. For such sins expiation must be made, but this was to be done by works of charity and love. Those oppressed with a sense of sin, finding but poor relief in their own exertions, naturally went to the priests or Magi, and

these, if treated liberally, gave the desired absolution. Thus the people became subject to the priest, and soon came to worship the creature more than the Creator. To illustrate the theory of Zoroaster respecting the value of good works as an expiation for sin, we will cite this parable, given by his followers: "It is reported of Zerdusht (another name for Zoroaster), the author of our religion, that one day retiring from God's presence, he beheld a man plunged in Gehenna, his right foot, however, sticking out. Upon inquiring into the reason of this, he was told that this man was formerly the lord of thirty-three cities, but that his reign was marked by the most atrocious cruelty and oppression. One day, however, whilst hunting, he beheld a sheep, caught by the foot in a thicket. Seeing this, a new impulse seized the king, and he alighted from his horse, released the animal, and led it to a pasture; and for this one act of tenderness and compassion his foot remained free, whilst the rest of his body, for his heinous crimes, was plunged into the woes of Gehenna."

Thus we have essayed to give some idea of the Magian system of belief, as it was undoubtedly that of the Wise Men whose story we are considering. However, as we know that even in the most corrupt periods God preserves to himself a seed, we may believe that these men, for the integrity of their lives and their active benevolence, had been singled out and prepared by God to bring the testimony of the East to the Incarnation of his Son. Perhaps they

may have cherished longings for the advent of a holy being who should deliver the world from the bondage of sin. It is alleged that they were influenced by a prophecy of their founder, Zoroaster, who predicted that in the latter days "A mighty one and a Redeemer should be, and that a star should herald his coming." A legend speaks of a company of Magi as watching for the appearance of this star, twelve of the holiest of them being ever on the watch. Their post of observation was a lofty rock called Mount Victory, and night by night they prepared themselves for their vigils by prayer and ablution in pure water. At last the star appeared, and in it the form of a young child bearing a cross, while a voice coming from it bade them proceed to Judea.

Doubtless these traditions and stories respecting the appearance of a mighty prince in Judea, grew out of the intercourse that occurred between the Israelites and the more eastern nations. The Jews, when visiting other countries, would naturally boast of the great honor to be conferred upon their nation, and as they took with them their Scriptures, the Messianic prophecies contained therein could not fail to attract the attention of the Magi, when inquiring respecting their religious belief. Then, too, much respecting the Messiah would be learned by these nations during the time in which they held the Israelites in captivity.

We know that when at Babylon, Daniel stood high at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and ultimately became

chief of the "Magicians, Soothsayers, Astrologers, and Chaldeans." Certain writers have alleged that the prophecy uttered by Balaam, and found in the book of Numbers, that "there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel," had direct reference to the celestial orb which guided the pilgrimage of the Wise Men, and that this prophecy was not unknown to the nations to which the Magi are supposed to have belonged.

We mention these things to show how these Wise Men may have become familiar with the Jewish hopes and longings for a Messiah. We must, however, acknowledge that it was mainly the Spirit of the Lord that quickened their faith and inspired them to watch for the first radiant beam of the day-star, which was to be the harbinger of "peace on earth and good-will to men."

Having thus spoken of the order of the Magi, to which these Wise Men belonged, before proceeding to consider the question of their country, we will refer to what tradition tells us of their number, names, rank, and the date of their journey. When Art first selected the Wise Men as a subject for her pencil, it became necessary to fix their number, and it was made three. This was probably owing first, to the fact of the threefold division of the race, as descended from Noah; then, as corresponding to their gifts, each supposed to be the offering of one; and lastly, as a symbol of the Trinity. Their names are even more doubtful than their number. Those which are embla-

zoned in jewels upon the skulls at Cologne — Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar — are the ones by which they are generally known; but these are confessedly the offspring of tradition, and were given them at a late period by a Western writer. Other names they had, as in Greek, *Magdalat*, *Galgalat*, and *Saracin;* and in Hebrew, *Apellius*, *Amerius*, and *Damascus*.

As to their rank, while it is said that it was not until the ninth century that they were called kings yet it is probable that they may have been rulers over petty dominions, as their ability to make the journey, and the munificence of their offerings, would indicate wealth and position; and as we have already seen, princes and kings frequently belonged to the order of the Magi. Moreover they seem not to have hesitated upon their arrival at Jerusalem to proceed at once into the royal presence, as though they could of right claim audience of King Herod.

The time of their appearance has provoked much discussion, some fixing it a few days after the Nativity, before the Presentation in the Temple. The early Church instituted the festival of the Epiphany or the Manifestation, called also "Twelfth Day," in consequence of a belief that the Wise Men reached the manger of Bethlehem on the twelfth day after Christmas, or the 6th day of January. Some have supposed that the adoration of the Magi took place several months later than the date of this festival, and others delay it even one or two years. It seems most natural to follow the chronological order which places

the visit of the Wise Men immediately after the Presentation in the Temple, perhaps about forty days after the Nativity; for had Herod's attention been thus directed to the infant Messiah, previous to the occasion when his parents brought the child to Jerusalem "to do for him after the manner of the law," it seems improbable that his being there for that purpose, would have escaped the notice of the anxious monarch. Moreover the gift offered by Mary at the time of the Presentation, doubtless would have been more than the pair of turtle doves, which was the least offering allowed by the law, had she then possessed the costly treasures, brought by the pilgrim sages. Against the supposition that any considerable time elapsed between the return of the child to Bethlehem and the coming of the Wise Men, stands the improbability that Joseph and Mary would have remained amid the discomforts of a crowded village, any longer than the prescribed duties of the Temple demanded.

Turning now to the second of the proposed questions we meet with new difficulties. To every country east of Judea has been assigned the honor of having been the home of the Magi; to Persia, because of its being the chief seat of the Magian religion; to Arabia, because the Psalmist has said, "The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts;" and to the Indies and Ethiopia for less obvious reasons. One tradition would have it that the Wise Men came from the remotest East, even from the borders of the ocean, and that two years were required for their journey. This

of course would imply a country even as distant as China. The favorite theory of the Papal Church has been, that they were each representatives of separate countries, and the diverse character of their gifts is cited, as having direct reference to the products of different lands. This would seem to favor the belief of the early Christians, that the adoration of the Wise Men was illustrative of the universal calling of the Gentiles; and certainly it is not incredible that the same God who led them on their journey, should have selected them from different lands and ordained that ere they reached the borders of Judea their paths should unite, and their mission become one; while, being of the same religious order, their fellowship would be perfect even from the moment of meeting. The fact that Persia was the chief seat of the Magi, does not conflict with this supposition, as we know that the sect had its adherents widespread among all oriental nations. If, however, it is better to choose one country as their common home, Persia is to be preferred; for in that country, as being the centre of their religious system, members of this order would be of a purer faith, and thus more susceptible to such impressions as would impel them to make the holy pilgrimage.

We come finally to the subject of the star which guided them and illumined their way. Some assert it to have been one of the planets; others a fixed star; still others a comet or some celestial phenomenon visible only to the travellers. The most elaborate

theory is one advanced in 1604 by Kepler, the famous German astronomer, who, observing the remarkable conjunction in that year of Jupiter and Saturn, conceived the idea that a like occurrence formed the celestial guide of the Magi. By careful calculations he discovered that about the time of the birth of our Lord there occurred a similar conjunction of these two planets together with Mars. Having also found that they came together in the constellation Pisces, he was further confirmed in his theory from the fact that Judea was called by Eastern nations the "fish land." This explanation, though ingenious, is open to the same objections, which may be offered to the theory that the star of the Magi is to be identified with any of the ordinary heavenly bodies; that, if so, it could not have gone before the Wise Men, as it is said to have done. Moreover, it could not have pointed out the exact house which was the abode of the infant Jesus, for it naturally would have receded as they advanced, and scarcely could have indicated the town, much less the particular house. Furthermore, the appearance of any heavenly orb, sufficient to attract and guide these Wise Men, surely would have awakened the attention of others among the astrologers of the East. But we do not learn from heathen traditions or writings, that at the period referred to, any such celestial phenomenon attracted the attention of oriental sages, while, as certainly, the Jews, although prepared by the Messianic prophecies and in a state of expectancy, were not aware of any unusual appearance in the heavens. We are

therefore inclined to the view, that just as God led the children of Israel through the desert by a "pillar of fire," so he led these faithful travellers by some luminous appearance resting in our own atmosphere, and visible only to those for whose benefit it was created. The calling of these Wise Men being miraculous, why not also other events connected with their journey, especially as only such an appearance as we suggest could have actually guided the pilgrims to the humble abode at Bethlehem? This explanation avoids the difficulty that the attention of the world would have been attracted by a more general appearance of the star.

Having now considered the questions suggested by the story, we cannot refrain from noticing some of the various methods employed by art to portray the sublime and picturesque subject of the journey, and adoration of these Eastern sages. In these efforts of art we find suggestions valuable in our further contemplation of the sacred story. Here we cannot do better than quote from Mrs. Jameson's "Legends of the Madonna," a book as instructive as charming. In this work we find descriptions by a true lover of art, of the rarest efforts of Masters of Painting, to reproduce upon canvas the homage of the Wise Men. Of the adoration of the Magi, as connected with art, she remarks: —

"As a subject it is one of the most ancient in the whole range of Christian Art. Taken in the early religious sense, it signified the calling of the Gentiles, and as such we find it carved in bass-relief on

the Christian sarcophagi of the third and fourth centuries, and represented with extreme simplicity. The Virgin mother is seated on a chair, and holds the infant upright on her knee ; the Wise Men, always three in number, and all alike, approach in attitudes of adoration. In some instances, they wear Phrygian caps, and their camels' heads are seen behind them, serving to express the land whence they come, the land of the East, as well as their long journey, as on one of the sarcophagi in the Christian Museum of the Vatican. The star in these antique sculptures is generally omitted, but in one or two instances it stands immediately over the chair of the Virgin. The mosaic in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome is somewhat later in date than these sarcophagi (A. D. 440), and the representation is very peculiar and interesting. Here the child is seated alone on a kind of square pedestal, with his hand raised in benediction ; behind the throne stand two figures, supposed to be the Virgin and Joseph ; on each side, two angels. The kings approach, dressed as Roman warriors, with helmets on their heads. In the legend of the fourteenth century, the kings had become distinct personages, under the names of Caspar (or Jasper), Melchior, and Balthazar, the first being always a very aged man, with a long white beard ; the second a middle-aged man ; the third is young, and frequently he is a Moor or Negro, to express the King of Ethiopia or Nubia, and also to indicate that when the Gentiles were called to salvation, all the continents and races of the earth of whatever complexion were included. In the old legend of the Three Kings, as inserted in Wright's 'Chester Mysteries,' Jasper, or Caspar, is King of Tarsus, the land of merchants ; he makes the offering of gold. Melchior, the King of Arabia and Nubia, offers frankincense ; and Balthazar, King of Saba, 'the land of spices and all manner of precious gums,' offers myrrh. It is very usual to find, in the Adoration of the Magi, the angelic announcement to the shepherds introduced into the background ; or more poetically, the Magi approaching on one side and the shepherds on the other. The intention is, then, to express a double signification, — it is at once the manifestation to the Jews and the manifestation to the Gentiles.

"The traditions of the Crusades also came in aid, and hence we

have the plumed and jeweled turbans, the armlets and the cimeters; and in the later pictures even umbrellas and elephants. I remember, in an old Italian print of this subject, a pair of hunting leopards or *chetas*. It is a question whether Joseph was present; whether he *ought* to have been present. In one of the early legends, it is asserted that he hid himself, and would not appear out of his great humility, and because it should not be supposed that he arrogated any relationship to the divine child. But this version of the scene is quite inconsistent with the extreme veneration afterwards paid to Joseph; and in later times, that is, from the fifteenth century, he is seldom omitted. Sometimes he is seen behind the chair of the Virgin, leaning on his stick and contemplating the scene with a quiet admiration. Sometimes he receives the gifts offered to the child, acting the part of a treasurer or chamberlain. In a picture by Angelo, one of the Magi grasps his hand, as if in congratulation. In a composition by Parmigiano, one of the Magi embraces him.

"In chapels dedicated to the Nativity, or the Epiphany, we frequently find the journey of the Wise Men painted round the walls. They are seen, mounted on horseback, or on camels, with a long train of attendants; here ascending a mountain, there crossing a river; here winding through a defile, there emerging from a forest; while the miraculous star shines above, pointing out the way. Sometimes we have the approach of the Wise Men on one side of the chapel, and their return to their own country on the other.

"On their homeward journey they are in some few instances embarking in a ship. This occurs in a fresco by Lorenzo Costa, and in a bass-relief in the Cathedral of Amiens. Before I quit this subject, one of the most interesting in the whole range of art, I must mention a picture by Giorgione in the Belvidere Gallery. It is called in German, *Die Feldmässer* (The Land Surveyors), and sometimes styled in English the Geometricians, or the Philosophers, or the Astrologers. It represents a wild rocky landscape, in which are three men. The first, very aged, in an oriental costume, with a long gray beard, stands holding in his hand an astronomical table; the next, a man in the prime of life, seems listening to him; the third, a youth, seated, and looking upwards, holds a compass. I have myself no

doubt that this beautiful picture represents the 'Three Wise Men of the East,' watching on the Chaldean hills the appearance of the miraculous star; and that the light breaking in the far horizon, called in the German description the rising sun, is intended to express the rising of the Star of Jacob."

These extracts, and particularly the latter, lead our thoughts back to the time when these Magi, whether from some watch-tower, lofty rock, or at the mouth of a hermit's cave, discovered the first faint rays of the rising star. We can picture to ourselves their rapt attention, as they gaze upon its increasing light, until with hearts overwhelmed with its significance, they prostrate themselves before its brightening glories, adoring the God of Heaven for His gracious favor, and praying to be guided forthwith to the Infant Prince. Then rising from the ground with solemn earnestness, they prepare, under the guidance of the Spirit, for their eventful journey. Now, they are upon the road, and lo, the bright vision is seen taking a westward course, while they, with new gratitude, follow its celestial guidance!

We call to mind a copy of a bass-relief which we have seen, representing the Three Kings upon their journey. First comes Gaspar, King of Tharsis or Persia, bending forward upon his horse, in solemn thoughtfulness, his flowing beard sweeping his breast, against which he presses the costly treasure which he longs to offer to the new-born king. Next, curbing his fiery charger, rides the youthful Ethiopian, Balthazar, who, with face upturned towards the glowing star, shades with his hand his dazzled eyes from

its piercing beams. Last of the three is seen Melchior, the Arabian, his mantle loosely bound about his head, and falling in graceful folds from his shoulders, while the solemn earnestness of his countenance and his clasped hands betoken the fervor of his devotion.

If the early Church is correct, and from different countries they commenced their journey, how startling and yet how confirming to their faith, the hour that united their pilgrimage.

No time lost in courtly introductions or needless explanation, each would point with reverent emotion to the shining star, and thus, as in a moment, it would be understood that one cherished purpose animated their footsteps.

Now, attended by a princely retinue, they come within sight of the shining walls of Jerusalem. What emotions stir their bosoms as they gaze upon the holy city. Weary months have been spent in crossing trackless deserts, wandering through tangled forests, climbing rugged mountains, or fording swollen rivers; but all this is past, and their goal well-nigh reached.

They enter the broad gates of the city, and full of the deep import of their mission, ask at once for the Royal Palace. The proud Herod gladly gives the noble strangers audience; but when they enter, and as if regardless of his crown and sceptre, put their question, "Where is he that is *born* King of the Jews?" his haughty visage pales, and his heart grows

faint, for he knows it is not he whom they seek. A fearful weight of crime oppresses him, and he hears the long-stifled voice of conscience warning him, that just retribution awaits his guilty soul. The affrighted monarch asks for time, and, as the royal ambassadors withdraw, he summons the Sanhedrim, composed of the chief of the Jewish priests and scribes. At his bidding, the council hastily convenes, and the King asks the question, "Where is Christ to be born?" They answer, in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judea, for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." He asks no more, but as we are told, calling privily the Wise Men, inquires diligently "at what time the star appeared." Upon hearing their response, his passions struggle for the mastery, and the tempter whispers, "It is not too late to crush, even in his cradle, this would-be monarch." Herod obeys the evil spirit, and, with crafty counsel, dismisses the travellers, with the command, "Go and search diligently for the child, and, when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

Obedient to the royal words, the sages leave the palace, and hasten to seek the road to Bethlehem. Lo! as they pass the city gates, again they see their guiding star.

Well can we understand the exceeding joy that, the story tells us, filled their hearts when seeing those

bright rays pointing southward. God, who had prospered them thus far upon their journey, was still their Protector, and the "Angel of his presence" continued to go before them as their guide.

They had but six short miles to pass and they stood before Bethlehem — Bethlehem, the birthplace of the Psalmist King; Bethlehem, fragrant with the memories of the dying Rachel, the widowed Naomi, and the faithful Ruth.

And now the star descended, and they saw it resting over a humble dwelling. They hastened thither, and when they saw the child and Mary his mother, they fell down and worshipped Him.

How grand the simplicity of the story! The Prince of Peace pillowed upon the bosom of a lowly virgin! He who was to rule the nations, the helpless object of a mother's tender care! His palace, a stable; his throne, a manger! And how sublime the faith of these kingly men! They doubted not that this little babe was the Holy One, whom they had hoped and prayed to greet.

With heads lowly bended, they worshipped, believing no earthly monarch so worthy of their praise. Then, opening their caskets, they humbly offered the rarest gifts which the lavish East could afford: Gold, in honor of his royal power: Frankincense, whose fragrant odors exhaling before him should mingle with the praises rendered to the God incarnate: Myrrh, appropriate type of that bitter cup of his passion, which wrung from his bleeding heart the agonizing

cry, " Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me : " Myrrh, emitting the same precious saving influence, which hereafter should lend a hallowed fragrance to the tomb, in which his crucified body was placed.

Thus fitting were these offerings to be laid at the feet of the babe of Bethlehem, of him, who though the heir to the throne of David, was to be the " Man of sorrows," who, though God eternal, came as the Friend of sinners ; and who, hereafter, though having all power in heaven and earth, should agonize in the garden, endure the Roman scourge, wear the crown of thorns, be mocked and spit upon, and led away to be crucified.

Here, excepting the simple announcement, " That, warned by God, the Wise Men departed to their own country by another way, the inspired record ends.

But though we leave the story, may its lessons of simple faith and earnest devotion remain engraven upon our hearts.

These Wise Men endured such trial of their faith, as but few have ever undergone. Called to their pilgrimage through visions of the night, or it may be, only by the promptings of their devout hearts, — undertaking a journey whose privations, perils, and uncertainties could be well imagined, — trusting to a star for guidance, whose fickle light, perchance, at any moment might be lost, — reaching the royal city of Judea, to find the reigning monarch ignorant of the new-born Prince for whom they inquired, — setting forth anew, their confidence unabated, though directed to an inferior town, — the object of their

search when gained, proving only a babe, surrounded by tokens of poverty, rather than those of regal dignity, — yet their faith seems to have strengthened, the nearer they approached the manger of Bethlehem, as if quickened by the holy influence of the infant cradled there.

No such test of faith is demanded of us. The veil is lifted, and clearer than the sun in its noontide brightness, appears the full significance of the Redeemer's completed work. We are not directed to the humble inn of Bethlehem, but to Calvary, where, on that middle cross, while the heavens were darkened, and all nature convulsed, for us and for our sins, the Saviour bowed his head and died.

And yet, if this were all, and that rocky tomb had forever held our blessed Lord, our faith might falter and our hope fail; but, as we hasten thither, with the faithful ones in the early morn of the first Lord's day we find the seal broken, the guard dispersed, the door unbarred, and Him whom we seek, no longer there.

His humiliation is past. He has come forth conqueror over death and the grave. His glorified body is assumed, and with majestic mien and royal grace, he ascends from earth, while anew the heavenly arches resound with the angelic chorus: —

> "Glory to God in the highest,
> And on earth peace, good-will toward men."

APPENDIX.

THE following extract from an article on the "Cathedral of Cologne," in the "London Quarterly Review," Vol. lxxviii., embodies the substance of a series of quaint legends collected by Johannes Von Hildesheim in 1375, printed in 1480, and republished in 1842 for the benefit of the Cathedral.

It affords curious illustration of the legendary beliefs concerning our subject, which were so prevalent in the earlier periods of the Church:—

"The prophecy that a star should rise in Jacob, having proceeded from a heathen prophet, the heathens themselves became interested in its fulfillment: and watch was kept from a tower on a high hill in India where twelve astrologers observed the heavens night and day. When the time was come, a brilliant star was seen to rise in the east, which shed a light all over the land, and was as bright as the sun. And the star bore within it the figure of a little child, and the sign of the cross, and a voice came from it saying, 'To-day is there born a king in Judea.' And this star was seen over all India, and the people rejoiced, and no one doubted that it was the same of which Balaam had prophesied. India included three regions, — each separated from the other by high mountains. One of these was Arabia, the soil of which is quite red with the quantity of gold it contains, and here Melchior was king. The second was Godolia, of which part is called Saba, where frankincense is so abundant that it flows out of the trees, and Balthazar

ruled there. And the third, India, contained the kingdom of Tharsis, where myrrh hangs so plentifully on the bushes that as you walk along it sticks to your clothes, and here Caspar reigned. But as they were best known by the gifts they brought, the Scriptures only mention them as the kings of Tharsis, Arabia, and Saba.

"Now each of the kings saw the star and determined to follow it, but no one of the three knew any thing of his neighbor's intentions. So each set off with a numerous retinue, and the whole way, though beset with mountains and rivers, was equally dry and level to them, and they neither ate nor drank, nor rested nor slept, neither they nor their servants, nor their horses nor their cattle, but followed the star without ceasing. In this manner the whole journey only occupied them thirteen days, though it took them two years to return. 'And whoever doubts this let them read,' says the little book, 'in the prophet Daniel, where Habbakuk was taken by the hair of his head, and transported from Jerusalem to Babylon in one hour.' (Bel and the Dragon, ver. 36.)

"But when they were come within two miles of Jerusalem, the star disappeared, and a heavy fog arose, and each party halted. Melchior, as it fell out, taking his stand on Mount Calvary, Balthazar on the Mount of Olives, and Caspar just between them, and when the fog cleared away, each was astonished to see two other great companies besides his own, and then the kings first discovered that all had come upon the same errand, and they embraced with great joy, and rode together into Jerusalem. There the crowd of their united trains was so great, that they looked like an army come to besiege the city, and Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled.

"And the strangers inquired for Him that was born King of the Jews, whose star they had seen in the east, and were directed, as the Scriptures relate, to Bethlehem. And the star again went before them, and stood over a miserable hut. In this hut lay the infant Jesus, now thirteen days old, with his mother Mary, who was stout in figure, and brown in face, and had on an old blue robe. But the kings were splendidly attired, and had brought great treasures with them, for it must be known that all that Alexander the Great left at his death, and all that the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon,

and all that Solomon collected for the Temple, had descended to the Three Kings from their ancestors who had pillaged the Temple of Jerusalem, and all this they had now brought with them. But when they entered this miserable hut, it was filled with such an exceeding light, that for fear and amazement they knew not what they did; and they each offered quickly the first things that came to their hands and forgot all their other gifts.

"Melchior offered thirty golden pennies; Balthazar gave frankincense, and Caspar myrrh; but what the Virgin said to them they quite forgot, and only remembered that they bowed before the child, and said, 'Thanks be to God.' Each of the gifts, however, had a significant history, especially the thirty pennies, which appear to have assisted at all the money transactions mentioned in the Scriptures. Having been originally struck by Abraham's father, they were paid by Abraham for the cave of Machpelah; and by Potiphar for Joseph to his brethren; and by Joseph's brethren to Joseph for corn in Egypt; and by Joseph to one queen of Sheba for ointment to anoint the body of his father Jacob; and by a later queen of Sheba to Solomon, whence, as we have seen, they came into the hands of Melchior, who now offered them at Bethlehem.

"Nor does their history end here, for as the holy family fled into Egypt, the Virgin tied up the money with the frankincense and myrrh, together in a cloth, and dropped it by the way, and a shepherd tending his flock found the cloth, and kept it safe till the time when Jesus was performing his miracles in Judea. Then being afflicted with a disease he came to Jerusalem, and Jesus cured him; and the shepherd offered him the cloth, but Jesus knew what was in it, and desired him to offer it upon the altar. There the Levite who ministered, burnt the frankincense; and of part of the myrrh a bitter drink was made which they gave the Saviour on the Cross, and the remainder Nicodemus presented for his burial; but the thirty pennies were made over to Judas for betraying Christ, and he threw them down in remorse at the feet of the high priest, whereupon fifteen went to pay the soldiers who watched by the tomb, and the other fifteen bought a field to bury poor pilgrims.

"To return to the kings. After they had made their offerings they

ate and drank and lay down to rest, but being warned against Herod in a dream, they returned to their own country by the regular way, and with all expedition did not reach it for two years. There they told all the people what they had seen, and the wonders God had wrought, and everywhere upon their temples the people erected the image of a star with the child and cross in it. And it came to pass that St. Thomas the Apostle was sent to preach the Word in India, and when he saw the star on their temples he was astonished, and asked what it meant. Then the heathen priests told him about the three kings, and how they had journeyed to Bethlehem, and seen the young child; at which St. Thomas rejoiced exceedingly, for he had heard of the Magi, as they were called, from the circumstance of the twelve astrologers, and he performed so many miracles that his fame filled the three Indies.

"Now the three kings were very old and infirm, but hearing of St. Thomas they each determined to see him; and again, as it so happened, they set out on the same day, and without knowing each other's movements, reached St. Thomas at the same time. And first St. Thomas baptized them, and then he ordained them priests, for the little book adds, 'they were not married men,' and never had been. And they built a city, and lived together in great joy and love for two years preaching the gospel. Then Melchior died and was buried in a costly grave, and shortly after Balthazar died also, and was laid in the same place; and at length Caspar gave up the ghost, and when his body was brought to be buried near his companions, Melchior and Balthazar, who lay side by side, moved asunder, and made room for him between them. And many were the wonders and miracles performed at the tomb; but for all that, the people forsook the right way, and fell into great heresies, and at length each of the three Indies insisted on taking the body of their king back to his own country.

"Now came the happy times of the good Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, who, after finding the true cross and the four nails, and the cloth in which the child had lain, and the old blue robe of the Virgin, determined on finding the bodies of the three kings as well. For this she travelled expressly to India, where after

much difficulty, especially on behalf of Caspar, who had got among a sad set of heretics, she succeeded in obtaining all three, and when they were at length deposited again in one receptacle, there arose such an unspeakably delightful smell, as convinced all the faithful not only of the identity of the bodies, but of their exceeding satisfaction at being together once more. By Helena they were taken to Constantinople, where they lay for some time in great honor, at the Church of St. Sophia; fell into discredit in the times of Julian the Apostate; rose again into favor with his successor; and were ultimately presented to Eustorgius, Bishop of Milan, a Greek by birth, who had done great service to the Greek Church.

"From Milan, Barbarossa, as we have seen, carried them off, and gave witness both of his own devotion to the Church and his favor for Cologne, by presenting them to that city, where they first lay in the old Cathedral of the Bishop Hildebold, and now lie in the new one founded by Conrad of Hochsteden, where, with God's blessing, they will remain until the day of judgment. 'Therefore,' the little book concludes, 'Rejoice, O Cologne! City rich in honors! and thank God that He has chosen thee, before every other city in the world, to be the happy shrine of the Three Holy Kings.'"

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THE THREE HOLY KINGS

"For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."